

Both Carrozzeria Zagato and Ghia executed a handful of unique 1900 based creations usually based on the ultra-high spec 1900CSS platform. In early Spring of 1954, legendary racer, tuner and builder, Carlo Abarth had done some work with Ghia on a one-off Abarth 2000 Coupe. Ghia was impressed enough to order up initially for their own internal use a 1900CSS chassis (s/n AR1900c *01742*) and with assistance from Abarth again completed one of the most striking and important 1900s ever executed. Much of the design however translated into profitable execution when the State-side order for a new 1900CSS came in from legendary San Francisco restaurateur, Al "Papagayo" Williams. His color, trim and detail requests were a very close match for a car they already intended to build. With their new "patron" footing the bill to the tune of nearly \$23,000, those at Carrozzeria Zagato must have been beside themselves with funding and freedom to do their best! There were two unique requests or requirements to the order. Williams insisted that the car have a unique disappearing, rear folding part-time seat for occasional use by the family favorite canine, their Great Dane! The design of the seat was both functional and as proved later when seen in various other vehicles over the next 30+ years immensely practical. The only requirement Carrozzeria Ghia insisted upon was upon completion, the car would make its public debut at the 1954 Los Angeles Motor Show.

This vehicle's design was revolutionary in a variety of ways with styling cues and features that would appear on numerous other vehicles frequently over the next 30+ years. When first encountered this Alfa looks very much like Ferrari's 1957 Tour de France models as well as their later 275 GTB series of mid-1960s Berlinettas. Most however see the first generation 1964-66 Ford Mustang "Fastback" in nearly every line and proportion. The interior also lent itself heavily to Ford's early Mustang program.

Although championed by Lee Iacocca, the Mustang's design team of Joesep Oros, L. David Ash, Gale Halderman and John Foster made no secret that this particular Alfa Romeo was the main basis of the Mustang design. Several elements were in fact directly copied without change or alteration. The side body cove indentations, $\frac{3}{4}$ rear fender and sloping roof-line as well as decreasing decorative roof "gills" all appeared on the production Mustang. Much of the grill and nearly the entire interior were also directly copied and only subtly altered. Delicately thin "pencil" bumpers with the smallest of bumperettes were closely fitted front and rear. These two found their way with only subtle changes on the production Mustang built nearly a decade later. If imitation is the best form of flattery, than the likes of Ferrari, Ford and nearly all of the major Japanese manufacturers of the 1970s and early 1980s certainly owe much to the pioneering design of Ghia's original masterpiece.

Upon completion in the Late Summer of 1954, this Alfa Romeo 1900CSS was shipped from Genoa to the Port of Oakland, California. Williams delivery was initially delayed as US Customs had a very difficult time understanding how to apply import taxes and fees on a vehicle that cost more than twice that of the most expensive Lincoln Continental or Cadillac Eldorado Biarritz. Williams was however eventually able to obtain a release of the car likely due to a combination of patience and the connections he had established as one of the Bay Areas most prominent residents.

True to his agreement with Carrozzeria Ghia, this Alfa Romeo was prominently entered and displayed at the Los Angeles Motor Show in December of 1954. The car was an absolute show stopper receiving a best in show award which would be the first of many. The Alfa was then returned to Williams home in Tiburon, California where it would be used regularly.

Williams was a society insider going back before World War II. His list of clientele and business associates remains legendary even today. San Francisco's elite and wealthiest individuals favored an area known as Nob Hill. High on the Hill, Williams and his wife Katharine built and ran for many years their world famous restaurant, the Papagayo Room on the top floor of the Fairmont Hotel from 1945 until its closing in 1961. Al and Katherine made their home and lived across the bay in Tiburon but together with their Great Dane joining them, the three would drive this Alfa to and from their home to their restaurant on a regular basis.

Although the 1900CSS was designed primarily for outright competition and the Ghia alloy coachwork one of the lightest ever fitted, the car was never raced or rallied in period which is likely why it remains to this day remarkably originally being still fitted with its "born with" engine, gearbox, rear axle and all other major minor components as built new.

In 1957 a few years before the Williams closed their restaurant, the car was offered for sale and purchased by Ms. Peggy Tush of Whidbey Island, Washington. Ms. Tush was quite the enthusiast and kept the car along with her 750 Bertone Coupe for many years and today there are some excellent photos of the car taken during her ownership. The car was owned and showed regularly by subsequent owners Paul Forbes, Frank Gabrielli and Dennis Gibbs before joining a prominent collection on the East Coast.

Today this pristine Alfa Romeo remains ready for outright racing, touring rallying or showing or simply for enthusiastic road use. It would be the ideal candidate for Villa d'Este or Pebble Beach and a welcome entrant in the Mille Miglia or any other manner of organized tour or rally one could think of.